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"ASLEEP IN JESUS."

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE,

Preached on occasion of the Death of

MRS. GEO. A. GIBBS,

IN THE

NORTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

CHICAGO, ILL.,

NOVEMBER 4, A. D. 1849.

By the Rev. R. H. RICHARDSON, Pastor.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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DISCOURSE.

“Weep not, she is not dead, but sleepeth.”—Luke viii. 52.

It is appointed unto all men once to die. Death is but the successor of Sin, by whom his way is prepared, and from whom he derives all his power. Wherever, therefore, the foul footsteps of Sin are found, there is found the path of the Destroyer. Universal as was the guilt of transgression, so universal is the reign of corruption ; corruption of the soul, and corruption of the body. And so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Thus has the grave become the common receptacle of the whole human race ; the garner into which all are gathered, by that Giant Reaper whose field is the world. All fall alike before his fatal blade ; the young and the aged, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the just and the unjust.

And of all it may with truth be said, that they “sleep in the dust.” They are called away to an earthy bed ; there to lie in stillness and repose, through the long night which succeeds the day of mortal life. And but for the light reflected upon the darkness of the future, from the bright pages of Holy Writ, we might not have known that there is any difference in the condition of those thus gathered together, to lie side by side in one vast dormi-

tory. To all human appearance their state is the same. Whatever diversity of lot and character may have marked their lives on earth, in the grave there seems to be no distinction. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean ; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not : As is the good, so is the sinner ; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. All go unto one place ; All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Their love, their hatred, their envy, is perished, and none have any more a portion in any thing that is done under the sun. Alike for all there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither all go. Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.

Such apparently is the uniform condition of the dead ; but such, really, their condition is not. There is a difference here ; a difference as great as that between noon and midnight, life and death, heaven and hell. There are two classes in this great congregation of sleepers, and but two. There is a line of separation between them ; a line by us unseen, but which is, in fact, the boundary line between two states ; of which the one is, in almost all respects, precisely the opposite of the other. To die is not the All of death : and though all alike die, all do not die alike. And it is this difference in the death, that makes the vast difference among the dead.

When, therefore, we look in upon the slumbering hosts who people the grave, we may not conclude that, because to human eye they seem to enjoy the same peace and quietness, their rest is really the same. We must go back to the hour of their departure from this world ; must learn in what situation the call of death found them, and then we

can know in what condition the grave now holds them ; for, as the tree falleth, so it lieth.

Now, of all those that die, one of two truths may be affirmed : *They either die in the Lord, or they die in their sins.* And these are the truths which determine the state of all, after death. By their relations to these, mankind in dying, are divided into the two great classes that dwell in the world of the dead. And thus, while we say of all that they sleep in the dust ; we may not say, that the sleep of all is of the same kind.

In one respect there is no difference. The earthly tabernacles of all are alike dissolved. The mortal and material bodies in which they lived and labored and suffered on earth, share a common destiny. They enter into the same dark and narrow house. They undergo the same process of dissolution and decay. They furnish a like banquet for corruption and the worm. But here the resemblance ends, and the heaven-wide difference begins. In all other respects, the sleep of those who die in the Lord is unlike that of those who die in their sins.

Of the latter, their sleep is one which does not deserve the name. It is not a state of rest. It is not a state in which the weary find refreshment and repose. It is not a state in which they are freed from the care and pain and toil, which so distressed their waking hours. The night, to them is not a period of calm and quiet slumber. Their rest is broken by frightful visions and troubled dreams. Strange Forms of gloom and terror, appear before their startled spirits. They are borne away by unseen, but irresistible powers, into the midst of fearful scenes. They witness sights at which they shudder, and from which they vainly attempt to turn away their eyes. They hear ap-

palling sounds, to which they cannot close their ears. They become the companions of other frightened spirits like themselves. They mingle with the Spirits of wickedness, once in high places, but now blasted and scarred by the angry glance of the Almighty. They walk amid serpents and scorpions, and spectres and deaths. And thus, through the long night of the grave, the visions of their heads upon their beds shall trouble them, and when at last they awake, pale and exhausted, it shall be to find those visions more than realized ; those fearful dreams of prophecy more than fulfilled : To find that long and dark and dreadful as the night has been, it was but the prelude to a longer day of profounder darkness and damnation.

Surely then, a state such as this scarcely deserves the name of Sleep ; and it seems but the bitterest mockery, to speak of those who have died in their sins, as “resting in their graves.” There is no rest ; no peace to the wicked ; saith the Lord ; to the wicked living, nor to the wicked dead.

But turn now and consider the state of them that die in the Lord. Theirs is a sleep indeed ; a state of real, peaceful rest ; a state in which the weary find repose. “They sleep in Jesus and are blest.” Their dreams are filled with visions of purity and loveliness and bliss. The Forms which visit them are the forms of angels clothed in light, and among them, One like unto the Son of man. The scenes into which they are introduced, are scenes of surpassing brightness and beauty. The sights which they behold, are such as the eye would feast itself upon forever. The sounds which they hear, are “the lulling sounds of heavens repose ;” the ringing harmonies of golden harps and silvery voices. They walk in celestial places, and in com-

pany with celestial persons. All around them is love and beauty and holiness and peace; and they wake at last, prepared by the vision, to enter with eager delight upon the more glorious reality; wake, invigorated and refreshed, to begin the duties and enjoyments of a new life.

The death of the righteous, therefore, is an entrance into rest. When we stand above their graves, and think upon the scenes which they have left and of those to which they are gone, we cannot but say; They are not dead, but sleeping: For,

I. *They enjoy a rest of the body.* The close of the day finds them tired and worn-out with its many labours. The work of the worldly life is one which tries all the energies of the frail body. It must labour, it must suffer; it must wear itself away in a constant strife with toil and trial. It must bear the burden of fatigue, of sickness and of pain. It must work while the day lasts, must faithfully fulfil the ministry of a material life, with which it is entrusted. When therefore the night comes, in which it can no longer work, it may welcome its release from the toil and sufferings of the day. It is now dismissed from service and may seek that repose which it needs. It lies down to rest; to forget all its weariness; to bury in oblivion all thoughts of labor, fatigue and pain. It sleeps unconscious of the past, the present and the future. The busy brain has ceased to act; the hands and feet are motionless; the eye is closed; the ear is deaf, the tongue is silent, and the throbbings of the heart are stilled. It has passed into a state of profound silence and inaction; a sleep without a dream, and which nothing can disturb nor break.

II. But there is a better rest than this, which awaits

those who die in the Lord. It is the rest of the soul ; to which death is but the summons, and in view of which, we hear a voice saying : Write ; Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

1. *They rest from toil.* There are labours of the spirit as well as of the body, from which the call of death releases the righteous. There are difficulties with which it has to grapple ; burdens which it has to bear ; tasks which it has to perform. It has its work to do in the world. It has its conflicts to wage with ignorance and error and doubt, with sin and trial and temptation. A thousand obstacles are to be removed or surmounted ; a thousand enemies to be overcome or avoided. It has its salvation to work out with fear and trembling ; to toil ever onward in the narrow way, amid its thorn and dust and ruggedness, and with foes of every kind upon the right hand and the left.

Thus is it wearied in the struggle of life ; its strength departs, and again and again it falls, panting and dispirited, if not utterly despairing. And therefore death to the wearied spirit, is a welcome, peaceful sleep. It rests from its labours and rests forever. No morning breaks upon its slumber, calling it again to plunge into the trying, toilsome scenes of its past life. It has found peace ;

"Peace, which ever shall endure,
Rest eternal, sacred, sure."

Unconscious of the restless, busy, weary world, body and spirit both sleep in peace, like the tired waves of the ocean, when the fury of the tempest is passed.

2. *The soul enjoys rest from sorrows ;* sorrows of every kind and degree. How many there are of these in the world, we need not to be told. We are all witnesses to ourselves, that, with all its joys and beauties, this is a world

of wretchedness and woe. Tears are in every eye, sighs break from every lip, the cloud is upon every brow. From the cradle to the coffin, we tread one unbroken path of suffering and care. Affliction meets us at every step. The objects of our affection are taken from us, and leave our broken hearts to bleed in lonely agony. Our cherished hopes and plans are withered at a breath. Falsehood, treachery and disappointment wound us every hour. Flood after flood of sorrow comes rushing in upon us, each rising higher than the last ; until we sink, or are swept away in the deep waters, crying ; All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

But death is the portal through which we escape all these sorrows. The tear never starts from the glazed eye, and the heart that has ceased to beat, never knows again the throb of pain. There are no more disappointments, no more blasted endeavours, no more partings, no more sighs, no more breakings and bleedings of heart. To sleep in Jesus, is to be forever freed from every form of evil, and to be forever admitted to the enjoyment of every form of real good.

3. And better than all beside ; *in the grave there is rest from sin.* The sleep and stillness of the tomb prove a welcome refuge from this great disturber of the peace. For he that is dead is freed from sin. The hosts of his foes all leave him at the door of the sepulchre, and he enters alone, to the undisturbed enjoyment of his rest. Temptations no longer assail him ; and Satan no more is seeking to devour him. The reign of the Monster is broken, and his soul is escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler. The load is removed from the spirit ; he breathes a new and healthful air, he rejoices in an atmosphere of peace

and purity. He hears no longer the reproaches of his own conscience, nor sinks beneath the frown of an angry God. From the sight of sin in himself, and sin in the world, he is there delivered. There the wicked cease from troubling. The lie, the curse, the Saviour scorned and the slighted Spirit, are no longer the occasion of bitterness and anguish. All is holy there.

Such are some of the features of the state of the righteous dead, in consequence of which it is termed in Scripture, a sleep. It is because, at death, all toil and doubt and sin and pain, both of body and spirit, are at an end. I might point you to other characteristics of that rest which awaits those that die in the Lord ; and of that final rest which remaineth for the people of God. But not to dwell longer upon these :

III. There is one other aspect in which especially, the death of the righteous is like a sleep. It is this : *The grave is but the temporary dwelling place of those who die in the Lord.* It is not, either for the just or the unjust, a place of perpetual rest. Death is no eternal sleep. Even the mortal body, crumbled and turned to dust again, shall awake from its long repose. For the hour cometh in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live ; and then, them that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him. For now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. And therefore, this corruptible must put on incorruption ; and this mortal, immortality. The night of the tomb is not an endless night. Lo ! the morning cometh ; the glad morning of the Resurrection ; when, at the sound of the Archangel's trumpet, all the dead shall awake and come forth ; the wicked unto shame and everlasting contempt, but the righteous unto life eternal.

They, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished, and we sorrow not for them, even as others which have no hope. We look forward into the future ; far down through the dim ages, to the dawn of an eternal day. We anticipate the time of the re-union of the now glorified spirit, with the then glorified body : when the sleep of the grave shall be broken ; when from their long repose the righteous shall awake and arise, to sleep no more ; when they shall awake in newness of life, and in united perfection of body and soul ; with powers re-animated and refreshed, for the joys and employments of the better world to come. That will be a glorious hour, when the slumbering millions of the saints shall be summoned from their beds, to meet the Lord at his coming ; an hour too glorious for human description or imagination. Not until the day shall break and the shadows flee away, can its glory be revealed. Until then we can but believe and hope ; can confidently expect that all this will surely come to pass, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

The thoughts thus briefly and imperfectly presented, are such as naturally suggest themselves, when we are called to commit to its kindred dust, the body of one of God's saints. In the light of inspired truth, the darkness and gloom of the grave are dispersed. It appears no longer as a cheerless, rayless prison-house, but a place of profound and temporary repose. They shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

And therefore as we gather now around the final resting place of our departed Sister and Friend, we say to each other ; Weep not, she is not dead but sleepeth. We think not of the corruption and decay which dwell in the tomb ;

we speak only of her taking rest in sleep. We recall with pleasure her life up to the time when she was taken from us, and we look forward to the time when she shall be restored to us. The memory of the just is blessed, and more blessed still, are the thoughts of their present and future rest and glory.

MRS. MINDWELL GIBBS ; eldest daughter of the Rev. John Woodbridge, D. D., was born in the village of Hadley, Mass., inheriting the name and the virtues of a sainted grandmother, eminent, in her day, for piety, wisdom, and every good word and work.

Her life was marked by no uncommon experiences, or by none, at least, of peculiar interest to those beyond the circle of her own friends and kindred. Within that circle, however, a void has been made, over which many tears have been shed, and will continue to be shed, while memory holds its place in the minds of those who yet remain. Her character was one eminently fitted to attract the love of all who knew her, and to render that love, once formed, peculiarly strong and permanent. Those who loved her once, loved her always. From earliest childhood she was remarkable for those traits, upon which true affection ever delights to fasten and from which it can never again be dissevered.

Gifted with more than ordinary mental vigour ; with a mind clear, strong, and remarkable for its sound judgment and power of discrimination ; she possessed at the same time those gentler features of character which called forth towards her, a love proportioned to the respect and confidence with which she was always regarded. To these two characteristics, is to be traced the unbounded influence which she exerted, even when a girl, over all who were

brought within the sphere of her acquaintance. At home, at school, wherever she was known, she became an universal favourite. The first-born of her father's family, she filled to its younger members the place of a second mother. She was their never-failing friend, counsellor and guide ; watching over them with unwearied care ; ever ready to sympathize with them in their sorrows and rejoice with them in their joys.

She carried with her the same character through life, and into all the relations which she formed with the world. She was ever noted for her nobleness and generosity of disposition ; her perfect disinterestedness ; her forgetfulness of self and unfailing consideration for others. She was content to find her own happiness in ministering to the happiness of those around her. No one ever appealed to her sympathy in vain ; and the exercise of that sympathy was always rendered more valuable to those who enjoyed it, by the wisdom and discretion with which it was tempered.

As a daughter, she was the pride and joy of her parents, in earlier as in later years ; always affectionate and dutiful and enjoying in the highest degree their confidence and love. The care and affection which they lavished on her, she endeavored to repay by every possible act of obedience and attention, anticipating their wishes and prompt to fulfil them. They mourn for her now with a peculiarly poignant sorrow ; as their first-born and their first-dead ; as the first whom God gave them, and the first whom he has taken away.

As a sister, she was the center of the family circle. All clustered around her as the especial object of their affection and regard. To win her smile of approbation and to

avoid her censure, was always, with them, an end worthy of most strenuous effort. Her approval was the source of their joys, and her rebuke the spring of their tears. If in perplexity, they resorted to her for counsel ; if in sorrow, for sympathy ; if in joy, their joy was not half-complete until she shared it with them.

As a wife, she could not be surpassed in pure and ardent affection and fidelity towards him, with whom she was united by the nearest and holiest of ties. She was affectionate almost to a fault. To fulfil the vows which she had taken with her heart, as well as with her lips, was the absorbing concern of her life. Her home was bright and happy to all who were privileged to sit around its cheerful hearth ; but especially to him, to whose happiness her domestic efforts were all directed. A smile and a word of welcome ever awaited him and met him at the door. But this is not the time nor the place, to depict the charm which she threw around the life of him whom she loved. Nor does it become me here to speak of the desolation which now reigns in the heart once so full of peace and joy. The heart knoweth its own bitterness as it can be known by none beside. There are sorrows too deep for description and too sacred for recital.

As a mother she was a model of affection and fidelity. Never did one realize more fully, her responsibility to those whom God had entrusted to her guardianship. To train up her children in knowledge and virtue, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, was the end of her purpose and her unwearying efforts. By precept, by example, by praying with and for them much, she aimed to form them in childhood, for usefulness, for honor and holiness, in maturer years. So earnest and diligent was she in this

labour of love, that during the period of her feeble health, which preceded her decease, she would rise often from her bed, to teach them the truths of God's blessed Word and the Catechisms of the Church; and when requested to resign this office to others, with an indefinite premonition of the shortness of the time which remained for her, she would reply, "No, I cannot give them up, I must teach them myself, while I can."

As a friend, she was all that friendship could ask; firm, faithful and true; ardent in her feelings and unceasing in her kindness. The constancy and strength of love for herself with which she inspired her friends, were characteristic of her own love for them, and only they who enjoyed her friendship could appreciate its worth. They did not themselves, learn its full value until she was taken from them; for as with those Persian vases of which we read, the richness of its fragrance was not known, until the vase itself was broken.

I cannot dwell longer upon these features in the character of her whose loss we deplore. Let us turn from the consideration of her social and domestic virtues, to more important points; to those truths which enable us to say of her, as she now lies in her grave: She is not dead, but sleepeth. It is not from her loveliness of character and deportment, nor from her fidelity in all the relations of life, that we are to derive our consolations. She might have been all that I have said; she might have possessed every charm to win the love of all who knew her; and yet, without the higher and better gifts of God's grace and Spirit, we could not say; We sorrow not as those without hope. Little could it profit her now, and little could it profit her sorrowing friends, to recall the scenes of her life and

the features of her character ; if in that life and character we did not find good reasons for believing that now, when sleeping in the grave, she sleeps also in Jesus.

At intervals during the period of her childhood, she became deeply sensible of her need of something nobler and better than the world could offer. Like almost all others brought up under the influence of pious teaching and example, she passed through seasons of deep concern, in the truths pertaining to her eternal interests. These seasons closed, however, without leaving her in possession of a good hope through grace. She herself thought and said afterwards, that she had not then known—what all must know in greater or less degree, before they attain to peace in believing—genuine conviction of sin ; conviction of its turpitude and guilt, and of her own participation in its corruption and penalty. As she grew up, the attractions and allurements of the world were not without their charms for her. In early womanhood she entered with eagerness and zest into the scenes of gayety and pleasure, to which her residence, at that time in New-York City, gave her access. For a while she drank of the cup of worldly enjoyment with avidity. With her unwonted charms of person and character ; full of sprightliness and life and loveliness, she attracted much attention, and was much courted, flattered and caressed. Though she retained during this period all her dignity of deportment, and simplicity and beauty of character, yet was she in love with the world and worldly things.

But again, amid these scenes of pleasure and excitement, the Spirit of God was heard whispering to her soul, and urging her “to forsake earth’s troubled waters, for a purer spring.” Had she then been placed amid more correct and

favourable influences, she might earlier have given her heart to God. But she turned, with natural and justifiable disgust, from the scenes of blasphemy, confusion and disorder, then enacted in the holy name of religion and within the sacred courts of the Lord's house. And thus her mind became again indifferent to eternal things.

It was not until four years ago, when she had returned to the quiet, peaceful home of her early childhood, that her faith in Christ was established, and she cherished the hopes to which that faith gives birth. Her acceptance of the Saviour was the result of calm, deep and earnest prayer and reflection. From that time her growth in grace and knowledge, seems to have been constant. Intelligent in her faith, it was her wish and effort to adorn the doctrine of God her Saviour by a steady progress in piety, and by a life of usefulness and fidelity in every station to which she was called. Her constant prayer was, that God would glorify himself through her agency.

It is not yet a year since she became one of our own number ; but it had been time enough to impart to her an ardent interest in the welfare of the church, and to make those of us who remain, deeply sensible, that the transfer of her membership to the Church of the First-born above, while her gain, is our bitter loss. Her life as a Christian was consistent, and evidently a life of advancement. She was faithful in the private duties of her closet and family, and never absent from her place in the sanctuary, on the Sabbath or at the weekly prayer meetings, unless detained by sickness or some other sufficient reason.

The prominent feature of her religious character was the childlike simplicity of her faith in Christ. She had

no disposition to doubt nor cavil, but received as a little child the truths upon which her hope of salvation was resting. She furnished in this the highest evidence that she was of the number of those of whom it is written: Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. Her last words to her Pastor, as he bade her farewell a few days before her final sickness—little imagining that on his return he should stand beside her open grave—were these. “I throw myself entirely upon the mercy of Jesus Christ. I am too feeble to think, to say or to do much. My only trust is in the Lord Jesus, and there I repose all my hopes.” During her sickness she often expressed herself to the same effect. And this Almighty Saviour, in whom she so implicitly trusted, did not leave her alone when passing through the dark valley. She spoke not a great deal, but always with faith and confidence in Him in whom she had believed. Though suffering greatly, she was patient and unrepining, thinking apparently, more of the sufferings of those who were sympathizing with her, than of her own. When the subject was once alluded to in her hearing, she replied “Jesus Christ suffered.” More than once she gave brief expression to her feelings. “Happy, oh! happy!” she once whispered, and then, in the language which seems to spring spontaneously from the heart and lips of every dying Christian, she added:

“Jesus can make a dying bed
 Feel soft as downy pillows are;
 While on his breast I lean my head,
 And breathe my life out sweetly there.”

Even when for a while her mind would wander a little it was still intent upon sacred and heavenly things

Once, when in this condition, she thought herself employed in teaching her children the truths of the Gospel ; again, she spoke of the church which she loved so much, and prayed for its peace ; again, she rebuked the error of those who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, counting themselves already to have apprehended and become perfect. While she hoped, for the sake of her family and friends that she might recover, and so expressed herself sometimes, yet she was willing to depart and be with Christ, which was for her far better. Her feebleness and suffering would occasionally prompt her to lament the weakness of her hold on Christ, but when assured by a friend at her side, that Christ pitied that weakness, she broke into an exclamation of joy in the truth, and begged that the words might be repeated to her.

But why dwell longer upon these painfully pleasing scenes ? Enough for us and enough for her, that she died in the faith and the hope of the Gospel ; died trusting in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. And now while her mortal body sleeps beneath the sod ; her spirit also rests in the bosom of her God. Two years from the time of her union with her now bereaved husband, she became the bride of the Tomb ; nay, rather, became a guest at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. And I seem to hear a voice saying unto me, Write ; Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

But she being dead yet speaketh ; speaketh through the holy memories which cluster around her beloved name.

AFFLICTED KINDRED AND FRIENDS—Weep not, she is not dead but sleepeth. And to you who enjoy like precious faith with hers, the same summons will soon

be sent, and you will lie down by the side of the departed. Upon you the same quiet sleep will descend, and to you the same gentle rest will be given. Then weep not, for as she sleeps, so shall you sleep; and as she wakes again, so will you wake, united forever. And if among you there be one who could not say to her, Thy people, is my people, and thy God, my God; Oh! seek an union with her Lord, who makes us one forever with each other, by oneness with Himself. The ties severed by the hand of death, may be united again beyond the tomb. But remember also that separation here may be final; that the grief which now oppresses you, as you behold your dear one committed to the grave, may be a thousand fold increased when you see her welcomed to the Kingdom of Glory, while you yourselves are cast out.

MEMBERS OF THIS CHURCH.—The loss of one of the dearest and best of our number, addresses a word to you. It is the language of her who is gone; who, on being asked if she had any messages to leave with those behind, replied, "Tell them to live near to God." They are the words which she would repeat, were she summoned back again into our midst; and which she would enforce by the revelations of that world where she now lives near to God, even in His immediate presence and glory. Be ye followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. Mark the pathway which they have trodden, and in so far as they were followers of Christ, be ye followers of them. Mark their lives of faith and love and holiness; and then mark their end, for the end of such is peace.

TO ALL HERE PRESENT; one closing word. The hour speedily cometh when every one of you shall be called

away to your places in the dormitory of the dead. Will those who stand above your graves, be enabled to say, Weep not, they are not dead, but sleeping? The answer to this question must be given now. Will you sleep the sleep of the just, or the troubled sleep of the wicked? Will you awake to shame and everlasting contempt; or to glory, honour, immortality and life eternal? Behold! now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation. Amen.

